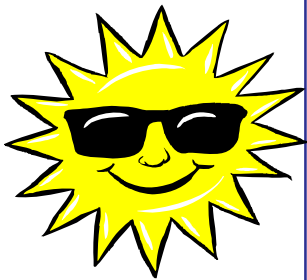


Department of Human Services

Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, January 3, 2007

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Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



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Granholtz vetoes ombudsman bill

Executive branch to retain authority

BY JACK KRESNAK
 FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

December 30, 2006

A bill passed by the state Legislature in the wake of the Ricky Holland murder case that would have moved authority over the Office of the Children's Ombudsman from the executive branch to the legislative branch was vetoed Friday by Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

In a message sent to the House of Representatives, Granholm wrote that the bill "suffers from several legal and financial flaws."

But, Granholm wrote, "The main reason for my disapproval is that under the bill, the Children's Ombudsman would be appointed by, answer to, and be subject to removal by state legislators appointed via a partisan process."

The transfer to the legislative branch "also would strip civil service protections from the dedicated career professionals working in the office," Granholm said in the message. Putting the office under the Legislature "could easily and unfortunately politicize investigations that ought to be pursued with one purpose: the protection of children."

The Office of the Children's Ombudsman was created in 1994 to investigate complaints involving child protective services, foster care and adoptions. Its powers were greatly expanded in later years.

The murder of 7-year-old Ricky Holland, a former foster-adoptive child whose body was found in January 2006 in Ingham County, prompted the formation of the House Special Committee on Child Protection. The committee's bill won approval by the full House and then by the Senate earlier this month.

The former committee chairman, Rep. Dave Law, R-Commerce Township, called the bill "key child protection legislation" and said he was disappointed in the veto.

"The governor has disregarded the recommendations from experts and is further putting the lives of our children at risk," Law said.

He said he hopes the committee continues its work under new Democratic leadership in the House beginning next week.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.



Former foster-adoptive child Ricky Holland's murder prompted formation of the special committee that sponsored the bill.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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December 30, 2006

Granholtz vetoes child welfare bill

Ricky's death prompts legislation that would have given Legislature control of ombudsman.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

LANSING -- Gov. Jennifer Granholm has vetoed legislation some advocates contend would have reformed the state's child welfare system in the wake of Ricky Holland's murder.

Granholm said the state has made numerous changes following the death of the 7-year-old onetime foster child, but critics such as state Rep. David Law called her "irresponsible" for vetoing a bill to transfer control of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman from her office to the Legislature.

The ombudsman investigates complaints against the state Department of Human Services, which critics claim is a conflict because both offices report to the governor. They claim the bill would have allowed the ombudsman to be freer to investigate abuse cases involving the state's 18,000 foster children.

"It's pretty clear the system is broken," said Law, R-Commerce Township, chairman of a special House committee investigating Ricky's death. "Governors don't like to give up territory that's under their control, (but) there is a problem with the system that demands correction."

A onetime foster child, Ricky was bludgeoned with a hammer by his adoptive mother, Lisa, and buried by his father, Tim, in July 2005. Testimony this fall in the Williamston woman's trial claimed she abused him for years. She is in prison for life; he faces 30-60 years for second-degree murder.

January's switch to a Democratic House makes prospects for an override shaky at best.

In a letter to lawmakers dated Thursday and revealed Friday, Granholm said a law she signed two years ago already increased the authority, autonomy and accountability for the ombudsman.

The letter claimed aligning the office with the Legislature could "easily and unfortunately politicize investigations."

Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said Holland's death already prompted the Department of Human Services to increase oversight by supervisors and change policies so complaints about foster families are investigated by workers in separate counties.

"We had a tragedy that occurred in the Holland case, and we had an unprecedented review by DHS and an independent review by the children's ombudsman," Boyd said. "We have a system of review in place, and that system worked."

Earlier this month, the department released its own investigation into Holland's death and acknowledged child protection workers failed to adequately investigate complaints of his abuse and took shortcuts before placing three of his siblings with the couple who killed him.

At the time, Human Services Director Marianne Udow described the report as the most candid disclosure about a child protection case in state history.

The same day, Ombudsman Verlie Ruffin released a separate report that found 36 errors by workers preceded Ricky's death.

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

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Published December 30, 2006

Gov. vetoes child protection bill

Ombudsman will continue under executive branch

Associated Press

Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Friday vetoed a Republican-sponsored bill that would have moved an office charged with ensuring children's safety from the executive branch to the legislative branch.

Republicans have said the Office of Children's Ombudsman would be independent if it were an autonomous entity under the Legislative Council, which is made up of lawmakers. The office currently is an autonomous entity within the Department of Management and Budget.

In a veto letter to lawmakers, Granholm said the bill had legal and financial flaws.

But she said the main reason for rejecting the bill was that it would have put the ombudsman under the control of state lawmakers "appointed via a partisan process."

The bill's sponsor, Republican Rep. David Law of Oakland County's Commerce Township, said Granholm rejected a bill that was drafted to be consistent with recommendations from the U.S. Ombudsman Association and the State Bar Association.

"The governor has disregarded the recommendations from experts and is further putting the lives of our children at risk," Law said in a statement. "Politics, once again, took a front seat in the governor's agenda."

The bill was introduced in the aftermath of the case of Ricky Holland, a 7-year-old Ingham County boy who died in 2005. His adoptive parents were sentenced for murder.

Granholm signs police, parolee measures

Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Friday signed a bill to keep involuntary statements made by police officers from appearing in the media. The bill makes confidential the involuntary answers given by law enforcement officers involved in internal affairs investigations. Their employers can threaten them with firing if they don't answer investigators' questions.

Supporters say the bill is designed to give police officers the same protections that private citizens can invoke under the Fifth Amendment's right against self-incrimination. News organizations say the bill will keep the public from knowing what officers being investigated have said and could possibly be used to cover up police wrongdoing.

Granholm said the bill brings clarity to a heavily litigated area of law and should not be interpreted as condoning police misconduct.

"This legislation is not intended to create barriers to information that the public is rightfully entitled to know," she said in a statement.

Also Friday, Granholm signed legislation requiring the state Department of Corrections to more closely monitor parolees convicted of violent felonies. The law was spurred after Patrick Selepak, who was mistakenly released from prison, went on a killing spree.



No. 2 Rose's case touched all

2006's Top 10 News Stories

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, December 31, 2006

By Ron Fonger

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

FLINT - Left to die in filth, her hair infested with lice, 5-year-old Rose Kelley's story disturbed even caseworkers and police investigators who regularly see children abused and neglected.

Rose died June 3 in her parent's rental home on Flint's east side after being ill for five days and never seeing a doctor, court records indicated.

The case became an example of problems at the Michigan Department of Human Services, according to some state legislators, who held hearings in Flint about it.

The state Department of Human Services had ordered Rose's parents to take parenting classes in 2004 and receive "prevention services" in 2005 after allegations that another child in the home had been medically neglected. But the state left Rose and other children in the couple's care, according to a court petition.

DHS is expected to release the findings of an internal review of its handling of the case in January.

Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton said the case clearly troubled people who heard about it - partly because it appeared the little girl's death could have been prevented.

"I think the reason the case got so much attention was the manner in which she died, the deplorable conditions and the fact that she basically starved to death," Leyton said.

Parents Jeffrey Kelley, 34, and Michelle Bowen, 32, pleaded no contest to involuntary manslaughter on Dec. 14 and were each sentenced to 17 months to 15 years in prison.

Bowen is expected to report to a state prison in Plymouth, while Kelley arrived Wednesday at an intake center at the state prison in Jackson.

- Ron Fonger

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Granddad waits for justice

Saturday, December 30, 2006

By Ken Kolker

The Grand Rapids Press

JAMESTOWN TOWNSHIP -- A year after his only grandchild was killed in her home, William Gelineau can't escape her wide, dark eyes and long eyelashes.

Photographs of Elizabeth Rose Gelineau are everywhere in his home.

He also can't escape the growing feeling that justice never will come.

Gelineau, 47, said he cannot understand why the Ottawa County Sheriff's Department has not solved the Dec. 11, 2005, death of his 16-month-old granddaughter.

"To me, this was a little baby who was murdered, plain and simple," Gelineau said.

"You sit here and think, 'What in the world could take so long?' Our suspect is right in our midst.

"We're pretty dissatisfied with the whole situation."

However, Sheriff's Lt. Mark Bennett said detectives are making progress and expect to take the case to the Ottawa County Prosecutor's Office "very shortly."

The prosecutor would determine whether to file charges.

"I'm comfortable with how the case is progressing," Bennett said Friday. "It's one of those things that takes time to build."

Authorities Dec. 11, 2005, were called to 1501 Ridgewood Drive in Ottawa County's Jamestown Township, the home of the toddler's maternal great-grandparents.

Rescue personnel worked on the girl for a half hour before she died.

The child lived there with her young mother, Rachel Timmer, Timmer's boyfriend and Timmer's grandparents, Percy and Louis Crothers.

An autopsy showed she died of head injuries.

The injury was not the first for Elizabeth. She was 11 days old when she suffered a skull fracture, broken ribs and a broken clavicle.

Her father, John Gelineau, then 18, pleaded guilty to child abuse and spent more than two months in jail.

He since has said he did not commit that assault and had pleaded guilty only to keep his family together.

Detectives said they cleared John Gelineau in the homicide. He and the girl's mother now are divorced, and he last saw his daughter four months before the slaying, he has said.

John Gelineau's father, William, said detectives told him about eight weeks ago they would reopen the first assault case to see if that could help solve the murder.

He said he has not heard from them since.

"I still think there are people out there who think 'the guy' is the bad guy," he said, referring to his son. "But if you connect the dots, John can't be the bad guy. Can't be."

Gelineau said he wonders whether Ottawa detectives have reached a dead end.

"I feel that they've shelved it," he said. "They say they're still working on it, but what are they doing on a daily basis? I don't feel like they can do much more."

If so, he said, they should consider asking another agency for help.

"We've contemplated other moves, such as asking the (state) attorney general to get involved, or the state police, or another agency," he said.

Gelineau said he last saw his granddaughter on her first birthday -- Aug. 7, 2005. He said the girl's great-grandparents had kept his side of the family away.

He said he and his family visited Elizabeth's grave at Georgetown Cemetery on the anniversary of her death. The tombstone, placed there by her mother's family, is marked only by the girl's first and middle names.

"Every anniversary, whether it's her birthday or Dec. 11, all those anniversaries bring the memories back," he said.

"Something happened in that house. Let's not forget you have a dead child here, but there are living people who continue to be affected by this."

Elizabeth's mother and great-grandparents could not be reached for comment.

Send e-mail to the author: kkolker@grpress.com

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December 30, 2006

Macomb County

'Baby Lexi Fund' to help pay bills

Family, friends asking for donations for critically injured newborn allegedly beaten by her father.

George Hunter / The Detroit News

EASTPOINTE -- A fund has been set up to help defray medical costs of a newborn girl who is hospitalized with critical injuries she allegedly received from her father.

Friends and family of 7-week-old Alexa Wieckhorst set up the "Baby Lexi Fund" to help pay the mounting medical bills. They also are going to area businesses with fliers asking for donations, family friend Kathy Kiefiuk said.

"The family is dealing with the situation as best they can," Kiefiuk said. "They are a close family and have rallied around each other and the baby to give her all the love and support they can. They have been spending their days and nights at the hospital."

Alexa's father, Ted Wieckhorst, 20, is being held in the Macomb County Jail on charges of first-degree child abuse. Prosecutors say he is responsible for his daughter's injuries.

Wieckhorst on Dec. 14 was baby-sitting his daughter in the Eastpointe home he shared with his girlfriend, police said. When Wieckhorst noticed his daughter was having breathing problems, he called his mother for help, investigators said.

Wieckhorst's mother went to the home and drove Alexa to the Eastpointe Fire Department for help. The baby was rushed to St. John Hospital by ambulance.

Wieckhorst told investigators that his daughter had thrown up, and while he was trying to clear her throat he bumped her head on the changing table. He also told police a cut on his daughter's lip came from a ring he was wearing.

Wieckhorst was arrested and charged Dec. 21 with first-degree child abuse. Bond was set at \$500,000. If convicted, he could spend up to 15 years in prison. He is scheduled for a pre-trial hearing Jan. 10.

Additional charges could be brought against Wieckhorst if his daughter's condition changes, police said.

To donate

To donate to the "Baby Lexi Fund" contact: La Salle Bank, 36909 Schoenherr Road, Sterling Heights, MI 48312-3371 or call (586) 939-4680.

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Donations to girl show 'people really do still care'

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, January 03, 2007

By Sally York

syork@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6322

Clothes, toys and money for a severely beaten and abused toddler flooded in from as far away as Canada and California, arriving just in time for Christmas.

"The outpouring has been tremendous," said Karen Vance, manager of the Citizens Bank branch in downtown Flint. "Instead of being just another bad story, this showed that people really do still care, even though they may never meet her."

The bank offered to set up the "Angel Fund For Gina" after Flint's Hurley Medical Center, the Genesee County prosecutor's office and Genesee County Sheriff's Department were overwhelmed with phone calls from people who wanted to help in some way.

The 21/2-year-old girl from Fenton Township had 47 wounds and injuries, including cigarette burns, when she wound up at Hurley in November.

Originally listed in very critical condition, Gina spent 12 days in the pediatric intensive care unit and was discharged from the hospital on Thanksgiving Day.

She is being cared for by a family chosen by the state Department of Human Services.

Her mother, Jessica A. Lake, 18, and Lake's boyfriend, Christopher L. Rowland, 21 - who tried to drop Gina off at Genesys Regional Medical Center on Nov. 3 - are scheduled to face Burton District Judge Richard L. Hughes in Central District Court on Jan. 16.

"We're moving forward on the criminal case," Prosecutor David Leyton said.

His office has filed a petition to terminate the parental rights of Lake and the child's biological father, who lives in another state and has no involvement with the toddler, Leyton said.

Gina's plight resonated loudly in the community. Vance said people from the Fenton area were especially generous.

"We just couldn't believe anyone could do that to such a little girl," said Jennifer Stankevich, an employee at Lockes Party Shoppe & Deli in Fenton. "We wanted to give her a good Christmas."

Stankevich and co-workers pooled their money, collected more from customers and purchased "boxes and boxes of stuff for her."

Two truckloads of presents made it to Gina through her social worker by Christmas Day, Vance said. One gift-giver was a Canadian woman who'd read about Gina on the Internet. People in California also made a donation, Vance said.

Among the gifts were food baskets, coats, diapers, sippy cups, a fold-out couch, books, puzzles and a teddy bear that had been "prayed over" in church.

QUICK TAKE

Want to help?

- Donations to a special fund set up for a severely beaten toddler can be made at any Citizens Bank branch.

The amount of money in the fund is "huge," Vance said, though she declined to say exactly how much, citing confidentiality concerns.

Meanwhile, Gina's physical condition has improved significantly since she left the hospital.

"The little girl is doing much, much better," Leyton said.

Donations have slowed to a trickle since Christmas, Vance said, but the enormous wave of giving has affected her in a positive way.

"This has made me have a little better outlook on our community," she said. "I feel good about it. But I still worry about Gina."

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ourMidland.com
from the Midland Daily News

12/31/2006

If we don't protect our children who will?

By [Amber Miles](#)

Kids, kids, kids. I'm 23 years old, and all I can think about lately is kids. No, not about having my own anytime soon. I've just been thinking about how my mom always tells me kids are a blessing.

Chalk it up to my covering the education beat for the past four months. Could be that. Maybe it's the fact that I have the honor of sitting near two coworkers and get to hear them discuss parenting from the male perspective. Those are the positive influences.

Or it could be the negative stories I've read about the mistreatment of children. Just this past summer the verdict for a Texas mother, Andrea Yates, was finally handed down -- not guilty by reason of insanity in the drowning of her children. Attorneys never disputed that she drowned her children, rather she "suffered from severe postpartum psychosis and, in a delusional state, believed Satan was inside her and was trying to save them from hell."

More recently, there's the Lisa Holland case, in which the Michigan mother was found guilty on charges she abused and murdered her son. Whether foster or biological parents, the real question is, when will the inhumanity stop?

There was a time when I vowed to remain childless. No snot-nosed, sticky-handed, cry-for-no-good-reason brats for me. No thanks. But when I hear about how some little tikes aren't able to experience a fun, healthy childhood like they deserve, I can't help but feel a tug at my heart. OK, so I'm not married and not looking to settle down now and start making babies, but I've thought about it some.

Adoption? That's an option. I mean all kids need a home. Plus, as tough of an athlete as I claim to be, the thought of pushing out a kid makes me cringe. Oh the pain. Sure, there's epidural anesthesia to numb the nerves, but I hate needles. What if I accidentally move and get paralyzed? But I've gotten off track.

It's about the kids and how too many parents take their blessings for granted. I'm trying my best not to judge. I know some people just aren't fit to be parents. Solution? Stop bringing children into this world if you aren't ready for the responsibility? There are far too many men and women who can't have children and only wish they had the opportunity that many waste.

Children are a full-time job. You work overtime, and you don't get paid for the hours. You don't get a medal of honor. You don't even get a first-place ribbon. But those who embrace the responsibility and love their kids unconditionally aren't in it for the accolades.

My favorite song when I was 5 (yes, I had one), was Whitney Houston's "Greatest Love of All." I never can remember the entire song, but the beginning stays with me.

"I believe that children are our future/Teach them well and let them lead the way/Show them all the beauty they possess inside/Give them a sense of pride to make it easier/Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be."

Children really are our future, and if we don't take care of them now, as in the cases with Ricky Holland and the Yates children, tomorrow might just be too late.

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Woman imprisoned for sex with boy, 15

BY L.L. BRASIER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

January 3, 2007

What began as an illegal sexual relationship between a 41-year-old woman and a 15-year-old boy ended quietly in a courtroom Tuesday when the woman, weeping and regretful, was sent to prison.

"I just want to apologize," Jami Lee Knox, a Farmington Hills mother of three, told the judge as her husband, Michael Knox, and the boy's family watched. "I'm truly, sincerely sorry for the pain and destruction I caused."

Oakland County Circuit Judge Rae Lee Chabot sentenced her to 3 to 15 years in prison. She was taken into custody immediately.

Jami Lee Knox pleaded guilty in November to three counts of criminal sexual conduct and three counts of using a computer to commit a crime. She told police that she lured the boy, then 14, into a friendship.

Then, when he was 15, they began engaging in sexual intercourse, she said.

The boy also exchanged text messages with her. His parents discovered the relationship in July and went to police.

The boy isn't being named because the Free Press generally withholds the names of sexual assault victims.

Since her arrest, Knox told the judge, she has been in therapy and attending Bible study.

In addition to the prison sentence, Chabot ordered Knox to pay the boy's family \$5,433 for his ongoing therapy.

The boy's parents did not speak in court, but Assistant Prosecutor Robert Giles read a statement from them: "We know good people make mistakes, but that does not excuse them from those mistakes," they said.

Knox's attorney, Michael McCarthy, told the judge that Knox was remorseful and anxious to do the necessary prison time so she could resume her life with her family.

Contact **L.L. BRASIER** at 248-858-2262 or brasier@freepress.com.



A remorseful Jami Lee Knox, a 41-year-old mother of three from Farmington Hills, was sentenced to 3 to 15 years.

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JANUARY 3, 2007

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University of Montana researcher studying the effects of meth exposure on children

The Associated Press

MISSOULA, Mont. — A University of Montana researcher is exposing laboratory mice to methamphetamine smoke to try to determine the long-term effect of the illegal drug on children who live in houses where meth is manufactured and used.

"I can say we have some very promising preliminary data that indicates acute respiratory distress, and we're moving forward based on those results," said Dr. Sandra Wells. "This will be the first information out there to address pulmonary injuries in children related to these exposures."

Wells' work with the Montana Alliance for Drug Endangered Children has led to proposed legislation seeking to expand the offense of child endangerment, making it a felony to expose children to meth.

"The fact that there is no good data out there, nothing to record any of the dangers these children are facing, that's concerning," Wells said recently. "We should be able to tell (state officials) with certainty what constitutes child endangerment."

Social workers, law enforcement officers and pediatricians have reported children removed from meth houses with matted or missing hair, dental decay, dirty diapers, rashes and other signs of abuse and neglect.

But there's no data to show if a child exposed to meth will experience long-term lung problems, like asthma or pulmonary fibrosis.

"It's not like secondhand cigarette smoke where we know for a fact that exposure is harmful," Wells said. "We treat meth as though it's radioactive, but in fact it's been approved for medicinal use at lower levels. I expect there probably is a safe level of exposure to meth, we're just not sure what it is."

But without sound data, it's impossible to convey with any measure of certainty just how endangered these children have become, or how urgent their care should be.

Helena police officer Craig Campbell, who spent seven years as a narcotics officer, said seeing sick children in houses where meth busts were taking place led to a change in the way meth cases are investigated.

"We don't just look at building cases against adults suspected of manufacturing or distributing anymore," said Campbell, who has been training law enforcement and first responders through Montana's Alliance for Drug Endangered Children since its inception two years ago. "Now we're also trying to prove and gather evidence for the crime of child endangerment."

"We're terminating cases and raiding labs earlier than we normally would have," he said. "As soon as we learn that a child is present, it becomes a priority to gain access and get them out of that environment. We don't wait for the distributor to make another purchase or possibly identify a higher-up. We just get the child out of that situation."

Over the past few years, about one-third of all cases where children were removed from their families and placed into protective custody involved methamphetamine, said Dave Thorson, fiscal bureau chief for Montana's Child Protective Services.

"That's been fairly consistent over the years," he said. "About two-thirds of our total placements involve drugs or alcohol of some kind,

and a full one-third involved methamphetamine."

Wells has been collaborating with her sister, Dr. Kathryn Wells, who is the medical director of the Denver Family Crisis Center.

Kathryn Wells wants to find a "medical home" for each child exposed to meth, so their health can be tracked over time.

"The only way to break this cycle is to follow these kids clinically, and that also helps translate controlled experiments into clinical research," she said.

Information from: Missoulain,

<http://www.missoulain.com>

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LEGALLY SPEAKING

Defining Custody

by Amanda Roggenbuck

This month I wanted to take a few minutes to explain the difference between legal and physical custody. Currently, MCL 722.26(a) defines joint custody as an order that a child shall reside alternately for specific periods with each parent. This is typically referred to as joint physical custody. A further definition is that the parents shall share decision-making authority as to the important decisions affecting the welfare of the child. This is typically referred to as joint legal custody.



Many parents find themselves in situations where they must determine what is in their child's best interest when dealing with another individual that they do not particularly want to associate with. As is often the case in family law, parents of children cannot agree who will take the primary responsibility for raising the children when the parents end their relationship. In that situation the parents may need to become involved in the Friend of the Court process. This process includes meetings, interviews, investigations and hearings. Ultimately, the Friend of the Court will generally make a recommendation as to who they believe is best suited to raise the children. The recommendation will focus on two parts, legal and physical custody.

It is important to understand that there are very limited circumstances that I ever suggest to a client to relinquish full custody. Giving up your right to consult or consent on issues such as medical care, education and religion can result in long term negative consequences for your children. Remember when determining who the best person situated to raise the children one must think not only in the here and now, but also in the long term. DO NOT give up rights that down the road may become significant to you and your child.

Visit our Web site at www.roggenbuckandassociates.com. I welcome your questions and comments. While you're visiting please sign our guestbook.

Amanda Roggenbuck can be reached at her Cass City office at 989-872-8881, with office hours Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Amanda would be happy to answer your questions in this column, and will address them as space allows. Please send your questions to editor@lakeshoreguardian.com or by mail to The Lakeshore Guardian, 9697 Purdy Road, Harbor Beach, MI 48441.

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Article published Jan 2, 2007

Child-support guidelines work against this custodial parent

I sent a letter of intent to have my child-support case reviewed, since I haven't asked for an increase for the entire 12 years I've raised our child on my own.

After review I received notice the support will remain at status quo. I will have to live with this outcome, as it is based on the income only of both parents.

What about the rent I pay for our child? What about the utilities, the gas I put in the car, the groceries that feed our child and everything else I've bought for our child's schooling needs. Now, the braces on our child's teeth will be coming out of my salary. I have a real hard time with the equation that is used to establish child support.

My rent went up, my employer's insurance company changed, and now more money will be taken out of my pay for our child's health, eye and dental insurance. I would like to know who established this child-support equation and what could be done to get it changed to be fairer for the custodial parent?

If anyone has any information or would like to form a task group to make some changes please step up, and we'll try to get something done.

KRIS JACOBS

Marine City, Dec. 29



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Published December 31, 2006

Highfields to offer a new Michigan youth program

LANSING — Highfields Inc. was chosen by the state of Michigan to provide services to families in Clinton, Gratiot and Ingham counties as an alternative for children who otherwise may be placed in temporary settings or juvenile facilities.

The Family Group Decision-Making program provides an early intervention method and can prevent unnecessary out-of-home placements such as foster care.

"The program offers a collaborative, coordinated process using the resources of families, agencies, and supportive services," says Jan Baszler, director of Clinton County Department of Human Services.

The model brings together both nuclear and extended family members. It reinforces the importance of children being around relatives and shows children and families available support networks.

— From Highfields.

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The Detroit Free Press

January 3, 2007

Healthy families program to get \$15,000 gift

A Detroit-based nonprofit, the Metro Health Foundation, has pledged \$15,000 for the third straight year to help fund a program that aids at-risk mothers and their babies.

The Healthy Start/Healthy Families Oakland program is administered by St. Joseph Mercy Oakland in Pontiac and funded by six community groups. Under the program, weekly visits are made to mothers starting before birth and continuing through the child's fifth birthday. Director Melissa Freel said about 250 families will be served this year.

The foundation, which funds health care programs for poor people, made the pledge last month.

Compiled by Kristen Jordan Shamus, Zlati Meyer and Korie Wilkins.

A census for homeless people

Oakland, Macomb counties need volunteers to count population

BY FRANK WITSIL and AMBER HUNT

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

January 2, 2007

This past summer, 18-year-old Kara Soulliere spent two weeks living out of her car before she found shelter with the nonprofit organization in Royal Oak, where she lives now.

"I think there are a lot more homeless out there than people think," Soulliere said.

Officials in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties agree.

They hope to find out just how many people are living without homes in metro Detroit by counting them Jan. 24 and Jan. 25 -- and they are seeking volunteers to help. Previous counts, some officials say, probably underestimated the number of metro Detroit homeless people.

Required by the federal Housing and Urban Development, also known as HUD, every two years, the count determines how much money is funneled to various nonprofit agencies, shelters, churches and soup kitchens that help the homeless year-round.

It also helps social service organizations set goals -- and put human faces with the problem.

"We want a culture of continual concern," said John Daniels, director of the Leadership Development Institute of the University of Detroit Mercy. Daniels tagged along for the count in Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park in 2005. The rest of Wayne County is counted separately.

"My heart was broken," Daniels said of his experience.

HUD requires the 2-year count from Continuum of Care agencies, which, under the HUD umbrella, help homeless children and their families. In Detroit, the Continuum of Care agency is called the Homeless Action Network of Detroit, also known as HAND.

HAND president and Salvation Army employee Candace Williams said that every night, there are 14,000 homeless people -- both sheltered and unsheltered -- in Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park. The count two years ago tallied 1,338 chronically homeless people -- meaning those who either land back on the streets repeatedly or never leave.

That translated to about \$20 million for agencies helping the homeless.

HAND hopes to begin the homeless count every year, not just every other, as required by HUD.

So does Oakland County, where 1,293 total homeless people -- not just chronic ones -- were counted two years ago. The county received \$3.2 million in HUD money.

"It's a baseline count for our plan to end homelessness," said Kathy Williams, housing counselor for the Oakland County Community and Home Improvement Division. Launched in October, the plan aims to end homelessness in Oakland County within a decade.

Oakland County plans to do its count Jan. 24, the other counties on Jan. 25.

Oakland and Macomb counties are looking for volunteers to help with the count. HAND, however, is not. It already has formed 40 groups of volunteers of about five apiece to fan out across the city. Each HAND group will have a professional service provider who knows the



Kenny Norton, 42, right, and his wife, Rachel, 52, eat dinner Dec. 25 at St. Elizabeth Catholic Community Church in Wyandotte during an event for homeless people. Officials in Wayne, Macomb and Oakland counties plan to canvass neighborhoods to find homeless people in metro Detroit. (Photos by WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press)

How to volunteer

To volunteer to help count the number of metro Detroit homeless people on Jan. 24 in Oakland County, and on Jan. 25 in Macomb, contact:

In Oakland: Michele Wehrheim at 248-928-0111, or e-mail her at mwehrheim@chninc.net

In Macomb: Amanda Sternberg at 313-887-6506 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday, or e-mail John Daniels at danielj@ud

mercy.edu

A census for homeless people

neighborhoods where homeless people gather.

Two years ago, Macomb County counted 947 homeless people.

About 200 of those were children, said Carrie Fortune, the county's Continuum Care coordinator. She said 31% of the homeless people were chronic and Macomb is seeing more first-time homeless people than in previous years.

Steve Overstreet, director of Shelter Services for Common Ground Sanctuary where Soulliere eventually found shelter, said getting an accurate count of people without homes is essential.

"Right now, because of the job market, there are a lot of people facing a lot of problems and homelessness can take on a lot of faces," Overstreet said. "Given unfortunate circumstances, they could be any of us."

Contact **FRANK WITSIL** at 248-351-3690 or witsil@freepress.com. Contact **AMBER HUNT** at 313-222-2708 or alhunt@freepress.com.

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Penny by penny, charities add it up

Monday, January 3, 2007

MARY L. LAWRENCE

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Saginaw County Salvation Army officials are ringing in the new year with a successful Christmas Red Kettle campaign, exceeding their 2006 goal by about \$15,000.

"In the final days we were collecting over \$100 each day in pennies," said Maj. Wayne Ruston. "That's how blessed we were. People were happy to give those quarters, dimes and nickels.

"I'm holding my breath to see how the rest of the campaign goes as we get responses from our mail appeal."

Ruston was confident volunteers would collect at least \$220,000 in kettle donations to assist more than 1,500 Saginaw County families.

Also announcing fundraising successes were organizers of the yearly Holiday Wish List, which the United Way of Saginaw County and the county's Department of Human Services coordinate, as well as the Toys for Tots collection that the U.S. Marine Corps leads.

Additionally, some 400 people shared a holiday meal the East Side Soup Kitchen prepared and First Congregational Church, 403 S. Jefferson in Saginaw hosted. It was the 15th year for the community meal that some 90 volunteers serve on Christmas Day. Other contributors included Magic Kitchen restaurant, Covenant HealthCare, St. Mary's of Michigan hospital, the Dow Foundation, Michigan CardioVascular Institute and several private donors.

"The public responded very well, as they have since we've been here," said Ruston, 44, who leads Saginaw County's Salvation Army with his wife, 42-year-old Maj. Tracy Ruston. "This is our fourth Christmas in Saginaw."

The collection could boost the annual fundraising total to an estimated \$415,000. That includes kettle donations plus \$80,000 to \$95,000 in general donations and another \$100,000 through the mail appeal, which continues through January.

Kettle donations help families during the holiday season. The Salvation Army uses the remaining dollars to offer food, housing, shelter, prescriptions and utilities to those in need throughout the year.

Supporters of the Holiday Wish List granted the wishes of 650 Saginaw County families. Eligible applicants received clothes, food and toys. United Way and the Human Services department have made the list of wishes available during the Christmas season for 21 years. The Saginaw News published the list of wishes in November.

"We were able to assist every family from our applications that we are able to contact," said Marsha Cooley, volunteer services coordinator for United Way of Saginaw County.

After extending its annual fundraising campaign by a month, the United Way of Saginaw County has yet to release a final 2006 collection amount. The county's largest charity inched closer to its \$2.8 million goal during the final week with a tally of \$2,511,832 or 89.7 percent of its target.

Meanwhile, organizers still are tallying the number of children receiving toys through Toys for Tots.

"It was very successful. Right up to Christmas Eve, we were still receiving and giving out toys," said Michael Roche, chairman of the yearly collection.

"Surprisingly," Roche said, "the Nerf toys were among the most popular donations."

Organizers established 73 toy drop-off locations in Saginaw County, hoping to collect some \$250,000 in unwrapped toys and donations between Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve.

Roche said the number of applicants for toys increased by about 10 percent. The final number of donors and recipients was unavailable. v

Mary L. Lawrence is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9676.

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Entering a new era

Monday, January 3, 2007

JILL ARMENTROUT

THE SAGINAW NEWS

For more than 136 years, Child & Family Services of Saginaw County has offered help to women, children and families. With new leadership this year, agency officials hope to continue and strengthen its role in the community so it can help people for 136 more years.

A staggered change in leadership allowed for a smooth transition as Margie M. Bach took over as chief executive officer this week. Former CEO Betty L. Nagel will retire as president of the nonprofit social work agency on May 31.

Bach, 34, former director of development and operations, will take over the presidency June 1.

"We'll split the duties for now and that will allow me to take care of some things while Margie learns," Nagel said. "When I started almost 18 years ago, I had to do the transition myself."

Nagel, 59, has led the agency since 1989, when she took over for Jack Frye, who led the agency for 27 years. She'll continue to lead fundraising and marketing efforts until June.

Bach has worked at the agency since 1999, when she began as supervisor of the sexual assault program. She became director of development and operations in 2005.

The offices at 2806 Davenport in Saginaw are receiving a face-lift with new paint and furniture, its first renovation since the Davenport location opened 12 years ago. The agency was based on Michigan before that, but its roots go back much farther.

A group of Saginaw lumber baron wives started the Home for the Friendless and Industrial School in 1870, incorporating the first incarnation of what would become Child and Family.

"They felt responsible and wanted to help with food, clothing and shelter," Nagel said

By the 1890s, the effort turned to orphans and the women renamed their charity the East Saginaw Children's Home. The Children's Home continued until the 1950s, she said. Then the focus changed from institutional care to finding foster homes for children. The agency was involved in child welfare, foster care and adoptions through the 1970s, Nagel said.

Leaders also began counseling parents and children in these years as they saw the need develop with adoptions. In 1968, the Children's Home merged with The Family Society, another nonprofit agency.

Child & Family Services of Saginaw County was created in 1964. Today, the agency provides individual and family counseling for emotional and behavioral health issues, employee assistance services under contract to area employers and comprehensive services for victims of sexual assault and abuse.

The agency has 33 staff members and an annual budget of \$1.05 million. In 2005, they served 5,677 people.

The United Way of Saginaw County provides allocated funding for some services, while state and federal grants provide funding for sexual assault services, which are free to clients.

Nagel was a manager at Westlund Guidance Clinic in Saginaw and worked in substance abuse treatment before coming to Child & Family

Services.

"We were providing counseling here, but weren't receiving reimbursement from most insurance companies and not serving the whole community," she said.

Under her leadership, the counseling staff grew and now includes two consulting psychiatrists. Staff members work with about 600 people in individual counseling.

A new community outreach coordinator works with patients who don't have health insurance. They pay a \$15 copay per counseling session. United Way funds cover the difference.

"We want to promote that position this year and our support groups for depression and children of divorce, which are free or at reduced rates," Bach said. "We have to be creative in how we offer services."

The average length of care for outpatient counseling at Child & Family is 14 sessions, Nagel said.

The agency no longer contracts with Saginaw County Community Mental Health for clients, as funding there has limited outpatient counseling. That has reduced the patient load, but may have increased the flexibility of what the staff can offer, she said.

"We have stopped and started a lot of programs, but we try to respond to the needs of the community."

Bach was one of seven candidates to lead Child and Family Services. She is developing a plan for the future.

"We need to find out what we do well and focus on that. We do amazing work with trauma here. Then we need to promote our mission to the community. People still don't always know what we do."

People who need help getting through trauma and transition in life -- loss of a relationship, a job or health -- need to know how to seek counseling, she said.

"Therapists don't have the answers; you have them. You make the decisions, but we can help you get unstuck."

In today's uncertain economy, this nonprofit agency will continue to examine its role and evaluate its services, Bach said.

"We want to make sure we're here another 136 years and helping build better lives." v

Jill Armentrout is a health writer and Neighbors coordinator at The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9681.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

State propping up the economy

Sunday, December 31, 2006

Michigan residents flailing to stay afloat financially already know this, but as the state claws its way out of a six-year economic sinkhole, statistics are providing the answer to a question nobody is asking anymore:

How do people live when there aren't enough good-paying jobs?

They just do, somehow, each in his or her own individual, personally responsible way.

While government has generally been the safety net for the destitute, its role in supporting families is broadening to include the just-barely-making-it.

The new year will likely bring health care to more than a half-million uninsured Michigan residents via Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Michigan First Health Care Plan. With federal approval, it would cover working people making 200 percent of the poverty level -- less than \$40,000 for a family of four -- who would pay premiums based on a sliding scale, but no more than about 5 percent of their incomes.

Unless you have groceries delivered or shop at only the toniest of malls, you've undoubtedly rubbed elbows with these people. You may even know them. And, increasingly, you could be them.

The latest statistics from the Annie E. Casey Foundation for the annual Kids Count report are an eye-opener.

How do people live when the marketplace doesn't provide jobs that allow them to pay their bills? Government becomes the third leg of the stool. Big time. Some statistics:

- One in every five Michigan kids -- twice as many as in 2000 -- get at least some of their meals from federal food stamps. That's more than 513,000 children 17 or younger. A mom with two kids is eligible if she makes less than about \$20,500.
- About 33 percent of Michigan kids get health care from the government, which amounts to 893,000 children. That's an increase from about 20 percent in 2000. Children qualify for Medicaid when a family of three makes less than about \$24,000.

Government not only provides the structure that makes the economy work for people with inadequate jobs, it's also providing the kinds of jobs we can only hope other Michigan employers might provide.

The Department of Corrections recently announced that it would be hiring about 700 corrections officers across the state, paying them \$14 an hour.

Too bad there are only 700 slots when Michigan has about 350,000 unemployed people.

Ironically, the increase in the use of government social programs comes just as the governor and lawmakers finally found a way to shake off one of the last vestiges of the "welfare state": They've approved a 48-month limit on cash assistance for healthy adults.

But this economy thing is just not keeping with the program.

The Department of Human Services is more than \$30 million short this year, in part because more people are applying for welfare through the Family Independence Program. Officials estimated in May that the state would have an average annual welfare caseload of 78,450.

But it turned out to be 80,360.

The good news is that after six months of increases, the caseload in November was 87,197, a decline from 88,133 in October.

Seems like government, if not the rest of us, is doomed to working overtime.

Contact Sharon Emery at (517) 487-8888, ext. 236, or semery@boothnewspapers.com.

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Kent in '07: safety, health and more

Saturday, December 30, 2006

The Kent County Board of Commissioners will be grappling with a host of important issues in 2007. A new year, three new faces on the board and a greater female presence might bring new ideas and fresh perspectives to some of the issues that continue to vex the county. High infant death rates, particularly for black children, and farmland preservation are on that list.

The trio of new members include two women, who will join the lone woman currently on the 19-member board.

Public safety and health as always are the county's top priorities. Other issues on the front burner include preparing for a renewal of the jail millage in 2008; continued development of Millennium Park and a decision on whether to keep a controversial admission fee to the park's beach, which has negatively affected attendance.

Funding for farmland preservation; assessing the area's mass transit and 911 emergency dispatch needs; getting the area's new Sports Commission up and running and seeing that plans to build a new \$27 million Department of Human Services (DHS) building in Grand Rapids stays on track are also on the board's plate. Financial issues are a concern, as well, with the loss of state revenue sharing funds looming in a few years. The board must prepare for the prospect of having to fill an \$11 million hole in its budget.

Patching up relations with leaders in Grand Rapids, which were frayed badly during the election, should be a priority, too. Hard feelings between the city and county can't be allowed to get in the way of projects that can improve services to county residents, about one third of whom live in the city.

Cooperation with initiatives such as the New Kent County Dispatch Authority, which is designed to expedite response times to emergency calls, and the new DHS building project benefit everyone.

There are certainly more pressing issues on the county's agenda but farmland preservation warrants further consideration by the County Board. Decisions made today about land use will affect how the county looks decades from now. Although the board passed a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) ordinance four years ago, it set aside no county funds to buy the rights to farmland to keep it from being developed.

Kent County has missed out on federal funds and matching grant opportunities from private local foundations because it has been unwilling to spend county money for farmland. Such purchases could help curb urban sprawl and help preserve the county's agricultural productivity. Commissioners should take another look at the public good derived from preserving farmland and consider allocating money to at least take advantage of matching funds that are available.

Kent County has a record of good fiscal management and has made strides in bringing more diversity to its citizen advisory board and commissions. County commissioners should continue those efforts as they prepare to appoint a 40-member board for the new Sports Commission, which will try to expand Kent County's share of the booming sports tourism market.

Board Chairman Roger Morgan, R-Rockford, has shown a willingness to listen to opinions other than his own and work with members from the other political party. That should make the challenges ahead in the new year and beyond easier to tackle.

From: Kim Frisch <frischk@MICHIGAN.GOV>
To: <DHS-PRESSRELEASES@LISTSERV.MICHIGAN.GOV>
Date: 1/3/2007 1:39:04 PM
Subject: January is Stalking Awareness Month

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Karen Stock at (517) 373-7394

JANUARY IS STALKING AWARENESS MONTH

January 3, 2007

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has proclaimed January 2007 Stalking Awareness Month in Michigan. Michigan was among the first states in the nation to observe Stalking Awareness Month.

"It is important for stalking survivors to know they are not alone and that there is help," said Debra Cain, executive director of the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board. "Stalking Awareness Month affords us the opportunity to share this critical information with survivors in Michigan."

Stalking may create a real and frightening threat to victims and their loved ones. Stalkers often are unpredictable and dangerous. In fact, an estimated 76 percent of female homicide victims and 85 percent of attempted female homicide victims have been stalked in the year prior to the crime. Michigan law defines stalking as "a willful course of conduct involving repeated or continuing harassment of another individual that would cause a reasonable person to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, threatened, harassed or molested and that actually causes the victim to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, threatened, harassed or molested."

"Stalking is a serious crime that has the potential to escalate into a very dangerous situation," said Colonel Peter C. Munoz, director of the Michigan State Police. "If you believe you may be a victim of stalking, I encourage you to contact your nearest law enforcement agency."

Stalking became a crime in Michigan in 1993. The Michigan State Police report there were approximately 27,000 reported incidents of intimidation/stalking in Michigan during 2005. About 1.5 million people are victims of stalking in the United States every year. One in 12 women and one in 45 men will be stalked in their lifetimes. Seventy-seven percent of women and 64 percent of men know their stalker.

"Along with reporting the incidents to law enforcement, victims also can contact their local domestic or sexual violence program for advocacy, counseling and, if necessary, shelter services," said Marianne Udow, Department of Human Services director.

The Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board funds agencies that provide those services statewide. Members of the legislatively enacted board are appointed by the governor and are charged with leading statewide efforts to eliminate domestic violence in the state. The board is administratively housed within the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Individuals who are being stalked or abused can find help by calling the

National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE or 1-800-787-3224 TTY.
For more information about the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and
Treatment Board including the Domestic Violence Resource Directory, visit
its Web site at www.michigan.gov/domesticviolence
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